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ABSTRACT

A detailed view of the various uses in Russian of the conjunction "poka" is developed in this article. Frequent examples illustrate clausal relationships, negative constructions, aspect, and tense in typical "poka" constructions. The principal function of "poka" is related to the linguistic concept of simultaneity, and the standard dictionary definitions of the conjunction are reviewed. (RL)

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The Conjunction *poka*

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The word *poka* with its colloquial or popular variants *pokamest*, *pokuda*, *pokudova*, has two obvious grammatical functions: as an adverb, with the meanings "for the time being," "so far," "meanwhile," etc.; and as a conjunction. This article is not concerned with any particular nuances which may attach to the colloquial variants, nor with the use of *poka* as an adverb, nor yet with its colloquial use as an expression of farewell. It deals with the meanings and uses of *poka* (*pokamest*, etc.) as a conjunction. Its purpose is to show that the word has a number of distinct uses which have not hitherto been distinguished with sufficient precision, and, more basically, that all these uses may be subsumed under one general meaning: whereas both Russian-Russian dictionaries (the Soviet Academic Dictionary, Barxudarov-Evgen'eva, Ušakov) and Russian-English (Alexandrow, Segal, Smirnitsky) divide the meanings of the conjunction *poka* under two main heads, those of contemporaneity of action and limitation of action (corresponding roughly to English "while" and "until" respectively), in fact this is a false distinction: the function of *poka* is to express simultaneity.

A convenient starting-point for the investigation will be the article "Poka-Sojuz vremennoj" in Vol. X, pp. 827ff., of the *Slovar' sovremennogo russkogo literaturnogo jazyka*.[1] There two basic meanings of the conjunction *poka* are given, of which the first "vyražaet odnovremennost' dejstvija, označaja 'v to vremja kak, kogda.'" This covers the meanwhich is normally rendered in English by "while." However, "while" in English invariably introduces a clause of continuous action, whereas in Russian the verb in the clause introduced by *poka* in this first sense may be perfective. Although neither the dictionary quoted nor either of the four-volume dictionaries associated with the names of Ušakov and Barxudarov-Evgen'eva respectively states that *poka* in this first meaning *must* be used with a verb in the imperfective aspect, it is the case that all of the fifteen examples which they give, between them, to illustrate its use do in fact involve imperfective verbs, expressed or understood.

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The follcwing examples, in which *poka* is used with a perfective verb, show that, unlike the English "while," the Russian conjunction may refer, not only to an action in its duration, but to the completion of an action.

In these cases the notion of simultaneity is present, but the action of the verb in the *poka*-clause is represented as having been completed, *after the conclusion of some period of action,* which may be indicated either in general or in precise terms. The most appropriate English translation of *poka* in such cases is usually "before," sometimes "while": Prošlo *neskol'ko dnej,* poka ja v čëm-to razobralsja (Ju. Trifonov, *Studenty); Za te neskol'ko dnej* poka on dobralsja do Skobeevki, on prošël celyj universitet partizanskoj bor'by (A. Fadeev, *Poslednij iz Udège);* Prošlo *vremja,* poka ženščina dobežala do mašiny (Ju. Nabigin, *Čelovek i doroga); Dolgo* u krest'janina žily treščali ot natugi, pokudova na nogi pročno podnjalsja (V. Kočetov, *Sekretar' obkoma);* Mašinu motalo *s dobryj čas,* poka my dobralis' do berega (N. Kaverin, *Dva kapitana*); Projdët eščë *neskol'ko minut,* poka solnce doberëtsja do Morjagina (Ju. Nagibin, *Četunov, syn Četunova*).

A frequent particular case of this construction is that in which the words indicative of time or action (corresponding to those in italics in the preceding examples) are not expressed, and some such phrase as *za to vremja* is to be understood before *poka.* In this case the most natural English translation is "by the time (that)": Poka solnce vzojdët, rosa oči vyest (proverb); Brat ni razu ne pokušalsja pokolotit' menja. V ètom emu nikto ne mog pomešat', i pokuda pribežala by iz sosednej komnaty Lizina njan'ka Fedos'ja, Andrej mog ottuzit' menja ves'ma porjadočno (N. Kruščevskij, *Nikolaj Negorev*); Večerom do takoj stepeni izmučilis' i ustali, čto, poka nakonec dobralis' do paroxoda, Pavlik zasnul uže v lodke (V. Kataev, *Xutorok v stepi*); Poka mal'čiki sbežali s obryva, parusa uže byli spuščeny (ibid.); Poka Semja dobrel do svoego kostra, nogi ego promokli ot rosy (A. Fadeev, *Poslednij iz Udège*); Poka xozjajka prišla, ostorožno nesja otpotevšuju korčagu s molokom,—Davydov uže spal (M. Šoloxov, *Podnjataja celina*); Seréža ne uspel otvetit' tem že: poka vybralsja, otrjaxnulsja, dognal, ostal'nye uže uspeli podnjat'sja na bugor (L. Leonov, *Russkij les*); Poka konej privedut—uspeeš' (K. Simonov, *Tovariščи po oružiju*); Poka ona dobralas'...do kraja bližajšego plota, mjač otneslo k sledujuščemu (V. Ketlinskaja, *Inače žit' ne stoit*); Tut poka miliciju syščeš', šiny-to tvoi do pjatok stopčeš' (K. Fedin, *Kostër*).

This use of *poka* in the sense of "by the time (that)," accords perfectly well with the definition quoted above from *Acad. Dict.,* where *kogda* is given as one of its equivalents. *Kogda* is, in fact, frequently used in this sense: Kogda Seréža vernulsja iz očerednoj poezdki, delo značitel'no prodvinulos vperëd (L. Leonov, *Russkij les* —the context makes it plain that the force of *prodvinulos'* is pluperfect).

Poka when used with a perfective verb without *ne* (apart from its colloquial use in the sense of "until," and from its use after *ždat'* and

its compounds, for which see below), usually has the meanings which it has in the examples given above. Occasionally, as in the following, its meaning is different: Poka vdali/ Zareckij naš i *čestnyj malyj*/ Vstupili v važnyj dogovor,/Vragi stojat, potupja vzor/ (Puškin, *Evg. On.*, VI, xxvii).

Here the words *poka vstupili* are a condensed expression, the meaning of which, expressed at length, would be something like: "while, having entered, they were engaged in..."

The turn of thought is similar in the following: Vixrovu udalos' pristroit'sja k šestviju, poka zadnij konvoir ostanovilsja podognat' otstavšix (L. Leonov, *Russkij les*). This "pregnant" use of *poka* is infrequent.

A very common use of *poka* with a perfective verb is that which occurs when the *poka* clause depends upon the verb *ždat'*, one of its compounds, or an abstract noun derived from one of these. The circumstance that *poka* after a verb of waiting can always be, and frequently is, translated into English by "until" may tend to induce the English-speaking student of Russian to expect the negative particle in the *poka*-clause. In fact, it is exceptional for it to be inserted. Two different types of relation, the distinction between which is blurred in English by the use of "until" after both verbs of waiting and other verbs, are in Russian distinguished from each other. In the sentences "he waited until the train went out" and "it rained until the train went out" the relations between the principal and the subordinate clause are not of the same order: the action of waiting is of its nature co-terminous with the action of the verb in the subordinate clause, and *poka* in such sentences expresses contemporaneity, not limitation of action.

The following examples illustrate this use: Ona ne sela i s prezritel'noju ulybkoju smotrela na nego, ožidaja, poka vyjdet kamerdiner (Tolstoj, *Vojna i mir*); On prošëlsja po zale, doždalsja, poka vse s"exalis', i, ne doždavšis' Anatolja, ne stal obedat' i poexal domoj (ibid.); Čerez polčasa na kamine zakipalo uže v gorške kakoe-to varevo, a v ožidanii poka ono pospeet, Valek postavil na trexnogij, koe-kak skoločennyj stolik skovorodu (Korolenko, *V durnom obščestve);* Učitel'govoril o něm: "Vot Evgenij, bednyj čudak, kotoryj ne ždët, poka plot' vsadnika pretvoritsja v med' (I. Èrenburg, *Xulio Xurenito*); Kogda sila pokidala ix, oni perežidali, privaljas' drug k drugu, poka pogasnet v glazax naedlivaja žëltaja purga (L. Leonov, *Russkij les*); Artem'ev, ostanovlennyj časovymi pered palatkoj komandujuščego, dožidalsja, poka ad"jutant... doložit o něm (K. Simonov, *Tovariščи po oružiju*); Daša kružilas' po metel'nym zavodskim allejam, dožidajas', poka Serëža vyjdet iz model'nogo (G. Nikolaeva, *Bitva v puti*); Ne ždali, poka priedet iz Moskvy tovariščи Izotov (N. Davydova, *Ljubov' inženera Izotova);* Petro podoždal u poroga, poka Jakov Matveevič odelsja i vyšel(S. Babaevskij, *Synovnij bunt)*; Ona... vyždala, poka vse zagljanuli (K. Fedin, *Kostër*).

Where the Russian verb of waiting is followed by the present perfective, what is indicated is the subjective intention in the mind of the

person waiting. The first of the preceding group of examples might be translated: "She did not sit down, but looked at him with a contemptuous smile, *waiting for the manservant to leave the room* " (it is not implied that the manservant did in fact leave the room).

On the other hand, where the verb of waiting is followed by the past perfective, what is indicated is the actual performance of the action of the verb in the *poka*-clause. The second of the examples might be translated: "He walked up and down the room, *waited until everyone had arrived*," etc. (it is implied that the persons referred to did in fact arrive).

Where the verb of waiting is imperfective, the verb in the *poka*-clause is always in the present perfective (except that, in sentences indicating repeated action in the past, the past imperfective may be used). Where the verb of waiting is perfective, the verb in the *poka*-clause is *usually* in the past perfective.

It may be pointed out that in sentences of this type also *poka* may be replaced by *kogda:* Tolpa... ždala, kogda pojdět poezd (Čexov, *Anna na šee*); —Meždu pročim, ob"javlen'ice provešeno v bibliotečnom zale, —skazal Sergej Ivanovič, vyždav, kogda čelovek s stekljannym glazom skrylsja za povorotom (P. Romanov, *Tovariščˇ Kisljakov*).

This would be a suitable point at which to consider what is usually (and mistakenly) regarded as a second basic meaning of *poka*, that of limitation of action, expressed in English by the word "until." The *Acad. Dict.* states that *poka* in this sense "vyražaet predel dejstvija, označaja: 'do togo vremeni kak' (obyčno s otricaniem 'ne')."[2] The corresponding entries in the Ušakov and Barxudarov-Evgen'eva dictionaries say much the same thing, the only significant difference being that, according to the former, *poka* in this sense, "so slovami 'do tex por' ili bez nix" is usually followed by a verb in the perfective aspect.

It is misleading to associate the use of the restrictive phrase *do tex por* particularly with *poka* + *ne* + perfective verb, since (as the examples in *Acad. Dict.* show) it is quite regularly used also with *poka* + imperfective verb to mean "(only) while," "for as long as": Petja... bil po neprijatel'skim èšelonam do tex por, poka xvatalo snarjadov (V. Kataev, *Zimnij veter);* On sčital, čto vlast' sil'na do tex por, poka potrjasaet i poražaet (G. Nikolaeva, *Bitva v puti*).

Such sentences as these make the use of *poka* with a negative perfective verb in the sense of the English "until" perfectly intelligible. The meaning, expressed at length, of such a sentence as: Za čto bednaja devka prosidela v čulane, poka my ne vorotilis'? (quoted in *Acad. Dict.*, loc. cit.) is "Why was the poor girl kept in the cubby-hole for so long as we had not returned?"-i. e., ... "until we returned" (where a present perfective occurs in a *poka... ne* clause, its force is future perfect). The omission of the negative particle in such cases would result in nonsense.[3] The rule as enunciated by Borras and Christian *(Russian Syntax,* para. 390 [i]) — "*Until* should always be translated by *poka ne*. It is colloquial and sometimes incorrect to omit *ne*"—derives its validity from the authority not of grammarians alone, but of logic. *Poka* does not,

properly, indicate limitation of action (Eng. "until"), but simultaneity, and the use of *poka...ne* in the former sense is merely a particular case of the use of *poka* in the general sense of "while."

The Ušakov dictionary is right in pointing out that *poka...ne* meaning "until" is usually followed by a perfective verb. It might, indeed, have gone further, and said that it is *always* followed by a perfective verb (where the appropriate perfective exists) except when repeated action is indicated: the function of the imperfective aspect is to express not only incomplete action but also repeated complete action. It is this that accounts for the use of the imperfective verb in the *poka* -clause in such cases as the following: My často sxodilis' vmeste i tolkovali vdvoëm ob otvlečënnyx predmetax očen' ser'ëzno, poka ne zamečali oba, čto my vzaimno drug druga moročim (Lermontov, *Geroj našego vremeni*).

Poka followed by *ne* and a perfective verb in the *past* tense is frequently used in another sense, quite distinct from that of limitation of action (Eng. "until"). In these cases it is equivalent to the English "before," where what is indicated is not mere priority in time, but anticipation of some undesirable event. This use of *poka...ne* corresponds to the use in Latin of "antequam" and "priusquam" with the subjunctive. It is illustrated by the following examples: Ne zasmejat'sja l' im, poka/ Ne obagrilas' ix ruka? (Puškin, *Evg. On.*, VI, xxviii); Ne pozvolite li vy mne pojti s vami v školu,—posmotret', kak vy tam zanimaetes'—poka eë ne zakryli? (Turgenev, *Nov'*); Odno, čto nam ostaëtsja umnogo sdelat', èto zaključit' mir i kak možno skoree, poka ne vygnali nas iz Peterburga (Tolstoj, *Vojna i mir*); On prodolžal, toropjas' skazat' kak možno bol'še, poka ego ne ostanovili (V. Kataev, *Beleet parus odinokij);* Ja dumaju, čto vy dolžny ujti iz "Afiny," poka vas ne vygnali (M. Aldanov, *Živi kak xočeš'*); Tuda nado bylo vorvat'sja, perebežav otkrytoe mesto, i sdelat' èto teper' že, nemedlenno, poka oni ne prišli v sebja (K. Simonov, *Tovariščі po oružiju*); Otpravljajtes' v gorod, poka vovse ne smerklos' (ibid.); Na vašem meste ja obošël by knižnye prilavki Rossii i skupal by svoë zlosčastnoe izdel'e,... poka junoe pokolenie ne podroslo (L. Leonov, *Russkij les*); Ubirajtes' otsjuda, poka ja ne priglasila policiju (V. Lidin, *Mogila neizvestnogo soldata*); Teper' važno bylo dejstvovat' srazu, poka xozjaeva ne uspeli opomnit'sja, poka ego ne vyveli (G. Nikolaeva, *Bitva v puti*); Nado potoraplivat'sja, poka traktoristy ne rastaščili počastjam ètot spisannyj traktor (V. Tendrjakov, *Za beguščim dnëm*); Pojdëmte v nomera, mamočka, poka ne stemnelo (B. Pasternak, *Doktor Živago*); Kladi, Il'ja Il'ič, rabočuju lapu na daču, poka ne pogas blagorodnyj plamen' (G. Konovalov, *Istoki*); Zaxotelos' ostat'sja odnomu, leč', i nemedlenno usnut', usnut', poka ne polezli v golovu nenužnye mysli (V. Ketlinskaja, *Inače žit' ne stoit*).

This construction also occurs in contexts where the notion of anticipation of an undesirable event is absent, as in the following examples: Do tex por, poka rabočij klass ne razvilsja eščë do rešenija svoej velikoj istoričeskoj zadači, objazannost' ego storonnikov zaključaetsja v uskorenii ego razvitija (Plexanov, *Socialism i političeskaja bor'ba);*

Možet byt' ono (tajnoe pravitel'stvo) suščestvuet, a možet byt' ne suščestvuet.Ja ne mogu ni utverždat', čto ono est', poka ja ego ne naščupal, ni s penoj u rta otricat', čto ego net (V. V. Šul'gin, *Čto nam nix ne nravitsja*). Ty ne toropis', poka ja tebe ne razrešil toropit'sja (A. Fadeev, *Molodaja gvardija*); Faktov net, poka čelovek ne vnës v nix čego-to svoego (B. Pasternak, *Doktor Živago*); Poka my ne načali—ni teni podozrenija ne dolžno padat' na našix ljudej (Šoloxov, *Podnjataja celina*); Trud, poka my ego eščë ne perelożili polnost'ju na železnye pleči mašin, èto prežde vsego ruki (V. Kočetov, *Sekretar' obkoma*).

In such sentences as these, where the main verb is in the present tense or the imperative and *poka* is followed by a negative verb in the past perfective, the force of the *poka*-clause is "during the period when something has not happened" or "until such time as something happens" (the latter would require the present perfective). The emphasis is upon the present state of affairs, when some particular thing has not, or not yet, happened, rather than upon the future time when this thing will have happened. The connection between the principal clause and the subordinate clause is weaker, and the realization of the action of the verb in in the latter (unless *poka* is accompanied by some such word as *eščë*) represented as less certain, than when *poka...ne* is followed by the present perfective: in the examples from Šul'gin and Fadeev, above, *poka...ne* could be translated "unless."

Notes

1. Henceforth to be referred to as *Acad. Dict.*
2. The examples illustrating this use in the *Acad. Dict.* are not entirely satisfactory. One of them is: Poka ne zamelo eščë nočnye sledy zverej, ja spešu na lyžax proverit' volka (Prišvin, *Na oxote*). This, however, illustrates, not the restrictive use of *poka...ne* (Eng. "until"), but its use in the sense of "before" in reference to an undesirable event (see below, p. 257). Another example given is: Utrami, poka solnce ne obogrevaet zemlju, na zelënoj listve derev'ev, na ponikšej ot xoloda trave ležit nežnyj, lëgkij inej (G. Markov, *Strogovy*, I). The same example is given in the Barxudarov-Evgen'eva dictionary, with the material difference that the verb in the *poka*-clause appears there, not as *obogrevaet*, but as *obogreet*. Not having the text of Mr. Markov's novel by me, I cannot say which is the correct version. It can be said, however, that *obogreet* is much more in accordance with normal usage: Messrs. Borras and Christian's remarks on a closely related point (*Russian Syntax*, p. 110, last example and ensuing observations) are relevant here.
3. As an example of the confusion which may result from the careless use of *poka* in the sense of "until" one might take the following: Druz'ja toptalis' na meste i "žali" do tex por, poka č'ja-nibud' spina ne vyderživala (S. Babaevskij, *Synovnij bunt*). The meaning which the author wished to express was: "The friends... 'pressed' until one or the other's back gave way"; what he wrote means either "...until one or the other's back held out," or "...so long as one or the other's back did not hold out"—i. e., the precise opposite of what he had in mind.

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